



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Narrabri container operator rail freight access problems tip of the iceberg - Windsor

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor, believes the recent rail freight access problems experienced by Narrabri container operators could be the tip of the iceberg in terms of rail infrastructure constraints to Newcastle and Sydney.

Mr Windsor said the need for an upgrade of the Murrurundi Range and associated passing loops was becoming more critical as the coal industry develops in the North West.

He said the recent problems with Narrabri business losing access to crucial rail slots and the difficulties experienced in finding rail operators to transport chickpeas and other produce at harvest time was a snapshot of what was to come unless the Government moves to address the situation.

He added there were growing concerns that rural produce would take second place to the coal industry in terms of access to rail freight unless adequate upgrades from Narrabri to Newcastle were expedited.

Mr Windsor said the \$1 million consultant report on the options relating to the current Murrurundi Tunnel was due in the near future. Out of that report it is hoped that an investment program is developed to overcome the emerging constraint problems.

“It should also be recognised that agricultural produce’s use of rail freight should not be relegated to an ‘also ran’ in relation to rail access as this could have a detrimental impact on prices for product to farmers,” Mr Windsor said.

“This has been clearly demonstrated by the recent chickpea freight issue.”

Mr Windsor said his attention had been drawn to the problem by Independent candidate for Barwon, Tim Horan, and that he and Mr Horan had spent time speaking with freight users in Narrabri.

Mr Windsor said he would raise the issue with the Transport Minister as a matter of urgency for decisions to be made in relation to infrastructure upgrades.

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“There has been a lot of hype about the inland rail link between Melbourne and Brisbane and the possibility of the Government spending \$3 billion on that infrastructure when it will cater for 0.6 train/day each way (3.5 million tonnes/year) with a growth to 1.3 trains/day in 2029 (7 million tonnes/year).”

“The North West, Hunter to Newcastle line in contrast will be responsible for moving up to 110,000,000 tonnes of freight with between 30-50 million tonnes/year envisaged to originate north of the Murrurundi Range.”

“It becomes fairly obvious where the priority should be,” Mr Windsor said.